Welcome, White Tiger Carnival

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Welcome, White Tiger Carnival

by mayinwinter

Summary

It was him, Hannibal, cradling Will in the embrace of his body, open and honest and appreciative, his wandering hand now cupping the warmth between Will's still clad legs.
It was Will, transmitting his impulse to voluntarily ignore for one second all the reasons he had to never want to be near Hannibal again, taking the opposite direction and searching for a connection in all levels, Will riding a wave of arousal high and intense, Will wanting to see Hannibal bared, nude, not hiding anymore, the skin and the flush and the excitement and the parted lips and blood, Will finally noticing the blood in the corner of his mouth.
Hannibal let go as Will brusquely pulled back, stumbling out of his perch on Hannibal's reclining body, eyes fixed on the now mouthfuls of blood spilling forth.

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The rescue mission goes in, with the unexpected aid of two of Hannibal's old acquaintances. Will seems to trust them enough to use them to connect directy with Hannibal. But their temporal reunion spirals out of control. And meanwhile, the enemy is preparing to bring down Hannibal's final shields.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

<He follows several trains of thought at once, without distraction from any, and one of the trains is always for his own amusement.>

Hannibal Rising, Thomas Harris.

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Finally, they were following the path of breadcrumbs so carefully laid out.

She couldn't blame them, not too much at least. They had Graham with them, it was true, but the breadcrumbs had been so purposely scattered. The hints thrown at Graham had been flimsy and capricious, they seemed done either as costly efforts, or the opposite, as an afterthought.

As always, Hannibal played a dangerous game.

"It's a carefully calculated risk, you well know".

The voice was melodious yet blank, flowing from the west where the early afternoon shone bright light over the mobilization of thirty eight elements, a mix of FBI and BM officers, lab techs and military personnel. Local cops were fanned around the two kilometer perimeter surrounding the silent and sterile white structure of Lab Complex One.

"A risk is a risk, in my experience, and will always take its toll from your flesh. But you don't need to worry, I am invested. You know me".

She looked up at her companion, the light reflected on the faded blond hair, the posture straight and even elegant in a dark blue ensemble, in the middle of the rolling, orchestrated chaos of vehicles and deployment of machinery and shielding units.

The flow of people passed by them without a second glance to their presence.

"I know you, it's true. Sometimes I think we know too much".

The taller figure looked down at the woman clad in black and dark reds, the white of her wireless headset a contrast to her chestnut hair. Her thoughts were being transmitted seamlessly, effortlessly, thus sometimes talking seemed almost unnecessary. But old habits die hard. Conversation was so pleasant, even with the snorts and the obvious sarcasm.

"Difficult to tell if we know too much, or if we just think we know too much" – the familiar snort, the moue of irony from her lips, more words –"But we have come so far already, I am ready to give my vote of confidence to this".

Matching smiles in their lips, their eyes lifting in time to watch the heavily-armed units break into formations surrounding six phrenakhartes stations, with their respective pilots in full connection mode.

The two of them had seen how the extraction and containment teams arrived to the place short of two hours before, comms cracking to life with barking orders, ready to throw their all in attacking the apparently empty lab, all on the mere say of one William Graham, Inquisitor sanctioned by Kade Purnell of the BM, the man who was sure former prisoner Hannibal Lecter was detained inside.

They had watched the scouting units doing reckon on the place, finding nothing along the three floors up and two basements down. Just cold walls and dead machinery still wrapped in their covers, a lab waiting to be brought to life.

The voice of Graham had been clear when he explained to the tactical teams that the whole place was under mental shields, and that whatever the scouts had seen had been nothing more than a clever neural projection interphasing through the conscious reality. If they wanted in, they would need to break through the defenses of the people who were hiding inside, and he pinpointed the weaker areas of the projection. Thus the heavy stations had been installed.

“Do you think it will be so easy for them, to break in?”

A demure smile.

“Let us have faith, and in its absence, let us provide some help. I suspect if left to their devices, half of their lead pilots will fall in short time. Many of the rest of these people will be cannon fodder despite our best efforts, but those we can help, we shall”.

‘That’s not exactly our job here’, she wanted to say as reply to the gallant statement, but it also wasn’t their job to sit idly through carnage. If Hannibal had an ulterior motive to wanting to minimize the damage to his so-called rescuers, so be it.

The two of them moved forward, each flanking one side of the line formed by the deployed stations.

Faster than what they expected, the six stations flared to life, manifested electric charges crackling through thin air and towards the laboratory building, seeking, piercing, advancing.

A moment of silence, nothingness, an increase of strain from the powerfully-minded pilots, and then a howling, thunderous crash as the backlash erupted and enveloped the entire place like the expansion wave of a bomb.

The two of them covered their eyes, thinking in unison, ‘*hostile group, engaged’*.

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She ran through explosions and screams, dismembered people along the way, there were men and women and children, the smell a horrid thing.

Her quick steps didn’t falter over the blood and gore and the mud, eyes fixed right in front of her, where two survivors kneeled in shock.

No, one of them was vomiting. The other was still as stone. They were whole but bleeding, surrounded by their enemies, neutralized, incapacitated, unable to move, to breathe, soon to

join the wreck of bodies and there were cries and one of them started screaming for his dead wife.

She reached them, coming to an abrupt stop, filling their line of vision.

She was a shimmering silhouette of white, her chestnut hair and her clear eyes the only speck of color in her.

With efficient movements, she knelt between them, a hand over each of their bowed heads, alternatively whispering in their ears.

There was blood in their mouths, and a flash of wakefulness in their eyes, and then she knew they would make it through fine, and she vanished towards another realm.

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She ran through darkness, and cold, and a sense of despair so thick it was nearly tangible, it enveloped all the silent figures that were slumped against dilapidated walls.

The place so bleak and the emotion so crushing, that turning your own gun against your temple seemed like the most logical and welcoming solution to end it all.

Many of the forgotten miserable men and women in the place had already done that, holes in their bodies and flowing blood barely distinguishable in the shadows. Three of the still alive abandoned figures were huddled close, embracing, whispering encouragement to the person whose trembling hands were lifting and releasing the safety of a handgun.

She moved forward, a shimmering silhouette of resplendent white, her blond hair and her clear eyes the only speck of color in her.

She reached them, pulling the huddling figures apart, grabbing fistfuls of their clothing and quickly touching their foreheads, murmuring words, waking the first one, the second one, and then the third person, the one with the gun, panicked and broke into a run.

She pursued, gaining ground fast, not losing sight of the lost pilot running ahead, as the dilapidated walls morphed past her into city streets, lamps, parked cars, a park, voices passing by, and then an abrupt blank space spurted forth, and the figure ahead stumbled to a halt. The ground beneath was crumbling at their feet.

She crouched, prepared to make the jump and catch hold of her target, but another figure materialized, bringing stability to the now empty realm.

It was Will Graham in his every day clothes, his right arm reaching out and touching the forehead of the confused pilot, his voice clear and echoing.

“Connection terminated”.

The pilot’s figure shimmered and vanished, and now Graham’s eyes were fixed on her, his sharp and powerful attention focused.

“I know who you are.”

She almost wanted to smile. Everyone knew so much, indeed. Before she or he could move or say more, her companion materialized to her right. Another figure in white, with clear eyes, but chestnut hair.

“I don’t know who you are”- Graham spoke, taking in the presence of the second of them.

“No time for introductions now, Will Graham. Your sixth pilot needs awakening, he and the dozen of soldier boys he’s got stuck with him in his mind” –both of them spoke at the time, their voices different but not dissonant.

They saw Graham blink twice, weary, and then nod. They knew he could not read any trace of violence or ill intentions from any of them, so with a deep breath, the three stepped through an opening void, Graham catching up side by side with them, the two women leading the way.

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Awakening the last pilot and the rest of the people trapped in the initial backlash of the enemy’s mental manipulation was done in a matter of seconds, working three together.

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When she blinked back into the physical realm of the here and now, she was not surprised to find a circle of armed men had surrounded her and her colleague. They had their guns at the ready but were keeping a careful distance.

At least they were clever enough not to mess with them, probably some of the officers still held an impression of the mental alters of these women saving their hides in the mind realm. The impressions would fade soon enough from their memory, though. Both she and her colleague were professionals, after all.

“How long, Mayor? How long before your units are ready to resume contact?”

She heard Graham’s voice coming right in front of them, as he pushed his way through.

The man with the rank insignia turned to throw Graham an unfriendly glare.

“We have two infiltrators in our lines, two mind divers, Graham. How did this get past you?”

She and her taller companion turned calm expressions towards the officer and Graham, but Graham’s equally unfriendly expression was aimed at the other man, ignoring them for the moment.

“I am not detail to your unit or safeguard to your men, Mayor, at least that was not how this was planned, I can take care of them when we are inside and aligned, I was not expecting to have to guard you outside. Besides, it was clear we had been infiltrated since I told you about Lecter’s roaming two days ago. They” –and Graham gestured towards them, twitchy and vague- “are not part of the opposing group, if that’s what you fear. I felt them move in when

we broke through the outer shield but they were taking your men out of the wreck, so I didn't see the reason to block them. Now, how long?"

With a nod, the Mayor in charge indicated for the man to his right to report.

"Less than four minutes, Sir. Our readings tell us that we lost four men to that first shockwave, they're unresponsive. The rest are recovering quickly, and the six pilots are back on line at 90%."

Graham swore.

"Those are four minutes they've got to strengthen their defenses inside. We broke through the first layer, the projection was too big in range and too old in existence to keep us out, but we need to move in now."

The Mayor looked at Graham as if he was speaking gibberish.

"I'd thank you to let me and my tactical team handle the infiltration, Inquisitor, now tell me what is going on with these two?"

Graham looked at her, and at her companion.

He looked at them, frowning, first addressing the taller of the women, with the blond hair.

"Her name is Bedelia DuMaurier. She was, hm, she is an acquaintance of Hannibal Lecter, according to the files. A former colleague, neural psychiatrist of his same caliber, you could say. Officially she is supposed to be detained in a mental facility, but I guess that's not so anymore."

She saw her partner, Bedelia, incline her head in acknowledgement, and because time was really pressing in these circumstances, she spoke up then.

"My name is Margot Verger. My colleague and I are private facilitators under contract with Hannibal Lecter, since several years ago. Sorry to barge in in your operation, Mayor, but it seemed like you could use a hand. As we are employed for the protection of the mental assets of our contractor, we seem to have a common goal, which is getting him out of there. Back into police custody is fine. We are involved only because his abduction endangers his mind."

Margot and Bedelia watched with almost twin, placid expressions, as Graham shrugged, not seeming surprised at all, while the members of the SWAT teams shook their heads in disbelief.

"What the hell, mercenaries?"-one of them couldn't avoid exclaiming, making Margot want to smirk.

To Graham's right, the people who formed the forensics team had joined the group. The woman of dark hair smirked well enough for Margot's satisfaction, her voice carrying a tone of excitement despite the grim situation.

"They're white tigers, aren't they?"

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The term was more applicable to Bedelia, to be honest, because Margot had her own agenda in play, but she didn't think they had time or disposition to be talking details right now.

Right now, everyone was frantically moving to take cover, guns going off in confused cacophony, aiming to take down the black-clad men pouring from the lab doors with their own weapons, while the pilots from their stations and Graham at the middle of the formation kept hollering to hold the fire, damn it, the attack was only a projection.

"We should move in" –to her left, Bedelia spoke, at the time she started to purposefully walk towards the entrance gates, nodding towards the pilots and expertly avoiding all fire and movement, physical or mentally projected ones.

"Get these women into custody, now, no external people are going in"- the Mayor had started to relay his orders, but the man as well as several other elements suddenly dropped to their knees, covering their ears. At the front, the pilots strained to diminish this new enemy tactic.

The second in command, a very tall woman with cropped dark hair and the name D. Lewis stitched to her uniform, took over and started to deploy the first extraction unit to follow the tactical schematics and make their way back into the building, following the path previously planned in accordance with the pilots and Graham.

Margot watched Lewis and Graham exchange few hurried words, quite clearly coming to the conclusion they had no time to retreat and regroup now, taking the nearly suicidal decision to trust Graham's tenuous opinion in allowing DuMaurier and Verger to join their force of mind immersionists.

Margot and Bedelia knew a decision like this would look bad in the overall assessment of the situation, but any other option would slow them down and risk opening a window of escape for the hostile group.

'Still, allowing Hannibal's tigers to walk with them, quite a daring choice for law enforcement'.

As Margot understood it, law enforcement considered people like them to be convenient alibis for crimes and corruption, figures that existed in the gray areas of the law and that should had been banned from practice years ago. To this day, only the very rich or very powerful could afford the luxury to hire the services of the rare and heavily guarded enterprises that provided mental alter egos to either take the shape and personality of the contractor or to execute orders and actions in mental realms on behalf of such contractors. Stand-by Alter Egos, or Duplicate Alters, they were called in the official way. White Tigers, they were popularly coined, with a negative connotation to it not because of their uselessness, but because of their potential danger and oddity.

The forensic team members were walking beside them and looking at them with suspicion but not outright distaste. Civilians, after all.

“So what, somewhere before going to jail for murder and mind cannibalism, Lecter hired you guys to make sure no one messed with his brain? How can that possibly stand now that he’s a federal state convict?”

The curly-haired one, Zeller, was talking to them as several officers did a final check on their equipment and prepared to go inside. The intercom signal crackled with ‘clear, clear’ every time a new element went in.

Margot turned distracted eyes on the man, most of her attention reading the signals coming in through her wireless neural transmitter.

“Law allows individuals the right to protect their freedom of thought, Special Agent Zeller. That is why immersions must be conducted with the consent of the subject. Forced immersion is allowed by specialists under circumstances such as the proof of crimes committed, or the strong suspicion of criminal actions as long as the mental invasion is done by a specialist granted the status of inquisitor. In all of this, though, nowhere it is stated that individuals are prohibited to attempt to guard themselves, not even when convicted. While Hannibal was in the Ward, his holding cell had mental protections in place, so we were under no obligation to do our job. When he was taken out for the fun of mind games, well, that’s another story, isn’t it?”

“Wow. You called him Hannibal. Only Graham here called him Hannibal, and that was unusual and definitely before the whole cannibalism thing came to light. I guess tigers tend to get very chummy with their boss, huh-wait a minute, are online with him now?”

Margot saw Graham shake his head at the parallel conversation. It was obvious Zeller showed promise in his mental abilities, but he hadn’t quite grasped the situation.

“She’s not online with him. DuMaurier is the one with the direct connection. She’s connected to DuMaurier”.

Bedelia didn’t care to turn or confirm Graham’s words, she simply continued to peer into the open gates. To their right, the agent named Katz spoke towards Margot.

“Must be weird, huh, sharing a consciousness so strongly with another person. Studies show it tends to create a sensation of double perspective with unified input of stimuli and even unified output of reactions. And you’re the only one with the physical connector on, so that means she” –and Katz was nodding towards Bedelia- “is extremely good at direct unaided connections, like Will here. That’s really dangerous. What with being synched with Lecter inside, too”.

“It is not a full connection, it is more like a guideline, lines traced in vague shapes. His focus is diverted and he is not under optimum conditions, we can only assume” –Bedelia finally spoke, and then the question that everyone must have been thinking was finally out in the open, voiced by Katz again.

“So why don’t you speak with him through her, Will? It can only help us, to know what’s waiting inside. I don’t trust these SWAT guys”.

Margot and Bedelia, their perspectives joined most of the time, turned to look at Graham and his reaction. The man still refused to turn full eye contact with them.

“I am not…It may not be wise, he can be under control already and it…”-but it was obvious his words lacked conviction, that he was stalling, until finally bringing his attention to Bedelia’s clear and neutral eyes- “Keep him back as much as possible, or this is going to get ugly fast. I need to start slow, to make sure his connection isn’t corrupted”.

“Certainly” –Bedelia said, and in the next second, she breathed in the pleasant ambience aroma of a well-cared-for office, the surroundings bathed in a dim light, not dark but not irritatingly bright, and she recognized this as the chosen battleground for Hannibal and Graham’s encounter. Interesting, that the battleground also exhibited signs of a safe haven in Graham’s perception. It was a joined khartes, after all, and even so the control of the place seemed to lean heavily on Graham’s favor, as definitely Hannibal was busy holding other battles.

“Doctor” –Graham addressed her.

No, him.

Bedelia’s own awareness of self was dimming, as if moving far to the back of a room, while Hannibal perception grew stronger.

“Will, please, take a seat” –he indicated from his own place on the armchair, nodding towards the matching one in front.

He watched Will sit down, his expression a mix of resentment and caution.

“You chose your former psychiatrist as your stand-by. Your former psychiatrist whose body is currently in a comma in some mental facility, I have to add. No one’s noticed she’s not corporeal, by the way. It’s a huge risk and it must be fucking hard to keep up”.

“Doctor DuMaurier has been in my confidence for many years, Will. She is an esteemed friend. Colleague, she usually corrects me, but we both know the truth of this. I hope you didn’t entertain any hope in my continued use of Uncle Jack into the scene. It would have been extremely disrespectful to his people”.

“No, Jack wouldn’t have been your first choice, no” –Graham smiled in twisted sarcasm.

Hannibal tilted his head to the side in a small fraction, considering, and he knew his eyes reflected unmistakable fondness. Oh Will, dear one.

“I assumed inviting you into the protection of my mind would not be a welcomed offer on your part, Will. Was I wrong? Should have I chosen you?”

The snort coming from the other man was loud in the stillness of the office.

“I know you think you are reading jealousy from me, Doctor, but try to keep your massive self confidence in check. You’re the one abducted in some dark corner of that lab, after all. I

just want to make sure DuMaurier and Verger can be trusted. And who is Verger? Can they be trusted to go inside with us?"

He smiled, pleased, amused.

"You are a bit out of practice in your dealings with me in the mental realm, Will. Such honesty you are demonstrating, such lack of restraint in your first impulses. You are aware you are asking me, convicted by society due to my crimes, whether you can trust my own associates?"

"I- yes, but I am asking you if they can be trusted to hold their own and help cover some of these people. I am not asking you if I can trust them to listen to me. I know they will listen to you. You are the priority for them-"

"And for you" –he added, the smile still in place.

"Not by choice" – Will´s glare was clear over the rim of his glasses.

"In any case, Will, I assure you, Doctor DuMaurier and Miss Verger are reliable, and have no instructions whatsoever to cause harm to you or the people involved in my, ah, recovery, so to speak. They will prove to be of great assistance, considering the time and circumstances."

Visibly, Will tensed in his seat, then stood up, the impulse to pace easy to detect.

"Tell me the circumstances. Who are they? How many people in the defense line, how many layers for us? What stage are they inside you? How much can you maneuver?"

Hannibal kept his hands stapled over his lap, the lines of his suit crisp and neat, unruffled, but still showing the edge of his pleasure at being the focus of the other man's worry.

"It is absurdly predictable, dear Will, and I have already relayed some of this information through my projection of Jack. It is a group under command of the Technical Secretary of the Presidency, operating outside of the conscious knowledge of the Secretary himself. I suspect at least two of his advisors are the ones responsible for the core decisions. They have the backup of a weapons contractor of the government, a very unpleasant man I have to add. He is more similar to a butcher than to an entrepreneur, for what I have inferred of the impressions of his associates. Truly, he is as appalling as he is astute and opportunistic, and more importantly, he has access to a grand variety of neural machinery, some of it quite medically unadvisable and legally inexistent. Once caught, I would recommend to seize and put under revision all of the physical and digital files in their offices and residencies. It seems they have compiled for several years a selection of files on people within the United States that show remarkable mental skills, like you, and me. I imagine it was a strike of great luck for them to find me so easily within reach and conveniently stripped of civil rights."

"Not exactly vulnerable, still, you're never wholly a victim, Doctor. If you are here and also holding connections with third parties, you are still able to defend yourself. Can you get me specific names?"

“Technicalities, Will, it will be very easy to get that information once this unpleasant situation is diffused. Now, regarding the incursion of the Bureaus’ teams. Avoid the second floor, it is physically altered and layered in explosives, material ones. Most of the energy cells are in that section, so it is a lose-lose situation. You won’t be able to cut off their main power source, but you won’t endanger lives as well. Or if the officer in command happens to decide those lives are expendable, they may try it. The people in charge of my abduction have backup generators in the underground floors, of course, but with a limited time for energy production. The first and third floor is where seventeen shielding pilots are located, the main defense layer. They are not operating to full capacity after the first attack from your side, though. I would advise to-“

He made a pause, his left hand suddenly twitching, his eyes narrowing and becoming insightful. It lasted less than an instant, but he knew Will had seen it.

“Have they gone through your shields?”-William was frowning, his steps taking him closer to where he sat, and it was a confirmation that the man kept clinging to his internal conflict between yearning for a connection with Hannibal, and resenting him twice more for that.

Hannibal resisted the urge to lick his lips. It could be played as a meditative gesture, but he knew Will would be able to read from him the coppery taste of blood in his mouth.

“To some extent, yes. Does this surprise you?”

Will didn’t answer, but his frown grew more pronounced and he came one step closer to him.

“They are holding some unfortunate test subjects in the first underground floor. They may try to figuratively throw them at you through residual mental projections, be cautious of them. Leave your standard pilots in charge of the upper parts, and bring mine and your people downstairs-“

“Test subjects that survived you, you mean?”

It was clear that Will was working through his resentment, but it was also clear that he had expected this scenario. With three more steps, the man had come to stand in front of Hannibal, the fabric of their pant legs even brushing. Hannibal had to look up to keep the eye contact.

“William, you are more than aware that they expected nothing short of a violent reaction to their attempts to immerse in my mind. The safeguards set in place could not spare them, that would defeat their purpose. I don’t particularly regret subjecting them to a savage welcome into my khartes, but in hindsight, I should have known the leading investigators would then turn them against you…”

“Where are you, then, where are the leading investigators?” – Will was looking at him with serious intensity.

Ah. Surely he had realized it by now.

“It is surprisingly difficult to tell with certainty, I admit. Somewhere below the second basement, it’s my closest estimate. Energy readings will show you a concentration of radiation that has been kept constant since they connected me to a neural station. The radiation amounts are frankly disconcerting, which explains the potency of this machinery. It’s a variation of an immersion facilitator conjoined with a reality distorter and a brain scanner with-“

Will’s hand was placed on the right side of his face, tilting his head even further up, interrupting his explanation.

“What have they done to you?”

Hannibal let him do as he pleased. Ah. He didn’t have much of a choice, anyway.

“I am very tired, Will. It has been taxing, and I might have strained myself a bit sometimes. I went for a walk last week, I did not want to miss the opera season’s openi-“

“What! You’re being plundered open and you stepped out of your body to go to-! And you’re keeping connections with Du Maurier and with Jack and you got a hold of Zeller and-! What have they done to you? Can you even move?”

Hannibal smiled again. Will, always so interesting, and endearing. How he had missed the young man, his contradictory beliefs, his tenuous morals, his stubborn convictions, his very remarkable brain.

“I can not. Not if I want to keep a hold of Doctor DuMaurier, at least. Her mind is incredibly powerful even in her vegetative state, but I still need to sustain her visible form for the connection to run smoothly in this realm. And as for my roaming” –again the urge to lick his lips, but Will’s palm was dangerously close to his mouth-“I find it unpleasant to remain fixed in this one point of my unofficial captivity.”

“Because you don’t want to pay attention to what they are drilling through your mind, is that it? So you flee out, as a defense mechanism.”

“You make it sound so pitiful, dear Will. I trust myself to hold out for a while longer, especially if you and my duplicate alters catch their attention and grant me some respite, this might-“

A compulsive swallow, a widening of his eyes, both slipped past Hannibal’s control.

Somewhere outside of this construction, he knew one of his decoys had been pulverized. In his ears only, he could listen to screams and cries and a woman’s voice. He knew the investigators plowing through his mind would assume it was his mother’s voice. In a flash, he saw those men breaching through a wall and coming to stand on snow speckled with red.

Will’s voice broke through his momentary glitch. Both of Will’s hands were cradling his head now, the man practically plopped on his lap.

“Hannibal! Hannibal, damn it. Let me get a hold of you. DuMaurier is too far to shield you properly, let me ge-“

“No, Will, do not even attempt to force your way in, I won-“

“Why! You were always so welcoming, Doctor. Can you trust some tiger and not me? I hate what you do, but I haven’t yet managed to hate you, I won’t take advanta-“

“You could be hurt, Will-“

“That’s not true!”

“It is, it-“

“Yes, it’s true, but that’s not the reason. Tell me. ”

Hannibal felt Will’s insistence, the power of his thoughts, hammering through his eyes, joining the one thousand other hammering motions of the investigators that held him prisoner below.

He should choose wisely which battles to fight, Hannibal knew. He folded back one millimeter, letting Will see more in his eyes.

“You might come to hate me, you might come to be bored with me, you might come to feel disgust. You would be something out of my control within me, and if you found but the mere trace of weakness, you would know how to hurt me. I cannot tell with you if you would use it against me, but the mere possibility is anathema to my desires”.

Another shock to his mental construction, and Hannibal trembled in his seat, aware he was telegraphing the pain clearly to Will, poised above him, warm hands on his face, demanding with his mind to know *are you ok are you ok are you ok*.

“Physically” –he gave in to the movement of his tongue, feeling his throat parched, and Will already knew anyway- “I might be bleeding more than expected, their connectors are invasive to achieve higher potency. Mentally, I cannot always avoid the brunt of their, ah, violation sounds so grisly. But yes, they are being quite rude”.

As the last word left his mouth, Hannibal felt it, the pull, the grasp, Will taking a hold of his mind, clawing in inelegantly, a mere inch within, but enough enough enough. His hands flew up, one to encircle Will’s wrist and the other to take a hold of his shoulder.

“Enough, William, hold back” –he nearly raised his voice, and he knew he was frowning. Distantly, he was aware he could very easily lose control of his side of this mental reconstruction of the office, and that he had been caught unprepared for Will’s insistence.

For his part, Will was doubling further down on him, this time their faces coming into contact, cheek to cheek, Will’s breath becoming haggard, but not releasing his tender physical hold.

“B-bastard, they’re slicing you apart or what. Fuck. Fuck. Give me a second, I can push it away”

The pain, Hannibal knew Will was referring to the pain. The boy had gone and taken hold of his outer sensations, something he and his tigers had avoided with great care and no little effort. It was dangerous, more so if the invading investigators realized there was another presence throwing tendrils within his mind.

“It is best if you let go completely, William, this is not ad-“

“You care, I see. I understood you cared about people in your own twisted way, but I had doubts, sometimes. It was always difficult to tell, afterwards, whether you had lied about everything or had just, just manipulated parts of it”.

Hannibal felt Will’s words, spoken practically against his temple, he felt the man taking a stronger hold with every second, and so Hannibal surged forth, the hand on Will’s shoulder now grabbing the back of his neck, pulling him back slightly, and finally connecting his lips over Will’s.

Finally.

The word reverberated throughout the khartes, unclear if it belonged to him or to Will. Or both.

He kept his eyes open, he saw Will’s own widened eyes, he felt Will’s intent to push him away, to protest the kiss, all the distrust and the disdain and the dismantling of Will’s morals fading out and leaving the both of them alone in the quiet office, kissing, not stopping, Will had closed his eyes and was turning the kiss rough and deep, pressed against Hannibal’s body, and Hannibal’s hand slid over Will’s back, soft over the vertebrae, sensuous in the caressing of his sides, daring in the touch that went past the waistband of the old Dockers and ghosted over Will’s ass.

Almost in slow motion, Hannibal could feel the fabric of his clothes start to dissolve away, an impression wholly outside his own doing. It was Will’s projecting, wanting to feel their skin closer together. It was a feeling of anticipation, the possibility of a fantasy materializing, it was some idea born from mixed emotions between them, something Will had never consciously embraced but had also never forced himself to forget.

It was him, Hannibal, cradling Will in the embrace of his body, open and honest and appreciative, his wandering hand now cupping the warmth between Will’s still clad legs. It was Will, transmitting his impulse to voluntarily ignore for one second all the reasons he had to never want to be near Hannibal again, taking the opposite direction and searching for a connection in all levels, Will riding a wave of arousal high and intense, Will wanting to see Hannibal bared, nude, not hiding anymore, the skin and the flush and the excitement and the parted lips and blood, Will finally noticing the blood in the corner of his mouth.

Hannibal let go as Will brusquely pulled back, stumbling out of his perch on Hannibal’s reclining body, eyes fixed on the now mouthfuls of blood spilling forth.

Hannibal saw how Will was unsteady on his feet, almost falling his knees, and he knew sharp and painful shocks from the invasive drilling in Hannibal were reaching Will's psyche, and were about to break their connection. Hannibal could afford to let go of Will now, he could not afford to lose more energy.

That he could afford it didn't mean he was pleased by it. The rapid turn this encounter had taken to pleasure and physical stimuli was deliciously appealing, not surprising per se as their attraction was more than a little obvious since the early stage of their interactions, but to imagine that Will would so wildly indulge in their repressed desires, it was sublime.

Will always managed to enthrall him, always beyond expectations.

"It would be best to hurry, dear Wi-"

———

A blink, then two, and Bedelia took in the image of William Graham standing in front of her, his eyes also gaining back awareness, and immediately reflecting a myriad of impressions. Surprise, guilt, shame, worry and finally a sort of prideful calm.

Bedelia knew Graham wouldn't bother to ask if she knew what had happened as Hannibal and he had established a connection using her as medium.

She might not have felt their bodies and emotions, but she had seen everything, after all. To her right, Margot was doing an excellent job at keeping a mostly neutral expression too, although her eyes were observing Graham with a higher modicum of interest.

One member of the forensics team, the agent named Price, was talking to them, apparently following through with what Katz had said before.

"So you're going to try and connect with Lecter now? What if they corrupt you when you make contact? If this were going to happen if would have to happen through a station to make sure the connection stays free, but we don't have the time. We are supposed to be following our assigned units into the building now".

Margot cut in.

"Don't worry, it's done. It can take only two or three seconds on the outside, but for the mind realm the passing of time is different".

Bedelia kept her attention on Graham, assessing. The man knew she was incorporeal, physically dependant on medical machinery and mentally dependant on Hannibal's force, all these were vulnerable conditions that white tigers rarely agreed to work in, but he didn't appear inclined to share this with the rest of his team yet.

The man appeared more focused in relaying the information he had gained from Hannibal, to the commanding officer that kept demanding status reports through the intercom devices.

"We're moving in, then" –Graham was instructing them- "You'll stay on the ground floor for containment and pullback of our people, because I fear we'll have men down soon enough" –

he was addressing the forensics team, all with grim expressions in their faces, as understandingly this was not their line of work, but they all seemed confident enough to take on the assigned task- “Keep an eye on the pilots in the six stations back there. Some of them might falter. I’ll get five to disassemble the defense layer, and one to follow me into the underground. Keep communication channels open, and take my signal only if I code it safe green”.

After the acknowledging nods, Graham started forwards towards the entrance, now addressing her and Margot as they walked beside him.

“We’ll have to go through what is left of the hosts of Hannibal’s recycled nightmares, it seems. Since you two are online with him, try and look for the primal triggers to see if they still hold some of his awareness so you can use that to-“

“You don’t need to explain this to us, we know what to do” –Margot decided to interrupt him, just because time was running short. She watched Graham grow quiet for a minute, but then he was turning to look at Bedelia.

“Why you?”

Bedelia didn’t hesitate to answer, and she didn’t spare him either.

“Why not you, is what you actually want to ask, Inquisitor Graham. And if you are not content with the answer Hannibal gave you, I will share my own considerations, but please note this is not definitive. You represent a great temptation for him, an opportunity for discovery and even joy, but you bring along a great risk. A risk to lose a part of himself, very unwisely protected, and Hannibal may think he has already lost enough to the foolishness of the ever-fickle heart”.

Both Bedelia and Margot heard Will scoff in self-deprecation and partial disbelief.

“Hannibal is not guarding his heart like some teenager in love. His pride, maybe, or the core of his mental abilities. That is most like him”.

The three of them passed through the main gates, quickly ignoring several mental barriers that pilots of both sides had erected to ensnare others, and dashed through the white empty lobby and towards the stairs leading down.

Margot exchanged a quick moment of eye contact with Bedelia, thoughts being shared simultaneously.

‘How blind he is, this William Graham.’

‘Put up you guards, please.’

‘Let Hannibal know we’re closing in.’

‘The nightmares will be dangerous, remember the image of the white pearls.’

‘Should we tell Graham about it?’

‘I think he will figure it out for himself fast enough.’

‘But he is so blind.’

‘Only to some extent. He will break through Hannibal’s carnival of horrors and then reach Hannibal’s real mind. That is what we must facilitate. We cannot provide him with more knowledge than the necessary.’

‘I still say he is so blind. Of course Hannibal is guarding his monstrous brand of love.’

‘It is not monstrous. It is simply difficult to predict’.

‘It is terrible, and amazing, and I want it to become real for him. And carte blanche to murder my brother, too.’

‘In the end, love is the most vicious motivator of all.’

‘Ah, look, the welcoming committee.’

———

Inside the Laboratory Complex One, in the first basement, three figures entered a wide expanse of wilderness, green forest and clear stream, a pond in the distance.

And doctor Hannibal Lecter, three-piece suit and perfectly styled hair, was waiting for them.

“Good evening, thank you very much for coming”.

End Notes

Perspective of tigers is difficult to write. If you are a bit confused by it, welcome and join me in this corner. I wanted to keep it more straightforward, but Bedelia and Margot kept having diverging opinions and vying for the narrative.

Yes, these ladies, I love them. And they are so above and beyond intelligent. No wonder Hannibal carefully cultivated relationships of years with them, to stay in their good graces. It's not so one-sided, however. My dear mercenary ladies are being well compensated in their mutual agreement.

More trivia? The idea of the white tigers is, this time, fully inspired by the alter ego in the movie Paprika.

What about the sex? Ah, the boys got a bit carried away there. I think both forgot that Bedelia was in the driving seat. Anyway, it was not the time for them to indulge. So, they will indulge in the next chapters when the world is crumbling around them and they are being attacked on all fronts. Silly boys.

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